

Mladic extradited to the Hague

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Ratko Mladic, former chief of staff of the Bosnian Serb Army in the Republica Srpska during the 1992-95 civil war, was extradited to the Netherlands on Tuesday, where he will stand trial at the Hague for war crimes.

Mladic, 69, was arrested by Serbian security forces on May 26, under orders from the Democratic Party government of President Boris Tadic. He faces charges of genocide and crimes against humanity, levelled on July 24, 1995, by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in the Hague (ICTY). He is accused of orchestrating the massacre of 8,000 Muslim men and boys in Srebrenica, as well as heading the siege of Sarajevo and other war crimes.

On May 29, a rally of several thousand was held outside the Serbian Parliament building in support of Mladic, which later erupted into rioting throughout the capital.

Two days earlier the ICTY appointed a trial chamber of three judges to hear the case. There is no reason to expect a trial to be held any time soon. Mladic had gone into hiding after the arrest of Slobodan Milosevic, the former president of Serbia and Yugoslavia, in 2001. His capture has been a precondition for Serbia being allowed to join the European Union. For years he was the formal subject of an arrest warrant, and a reward of €5 million. Serbia increased the reward to €10 million late last year.

Mladic was sought alongside Radovan Karadzic, first president of the Republica Srpska, who was arrested on July 21, 2008, and is currently in the custody of the ICTY awaiting trial. The ICTY prosecutor at the time, Carla Del Ponte, stated that Mladic had been in reach of the Serbian authorities since 1998. She warned that unless he was captured by May 1, 2006, Serbia's entry into the EU would be in jeopardy.

However, in addition to Serbia's reluctance to capture Mladic, there has been behind-the-scenes opposition to his arrest on the part of the United States, Britain and France. This was revealed following the capture of Karadzic, who is charged with 11 counts, including the siege of Sarajevo and the Srebrenica massacre—officially the largest mass murder in Europe since World War II.

Karadzic disappeared following the signing of the November 1995 Dayton Accord, which partitioned the former Yugoslav republic into two ethnically based entities—the Republika Srpska (RS) and the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina (the Muslim-Croat alliance). Upon capture, his lawyers claimed that

he had been offered immunity by the US in return for stepping down from office and disappearing from public life. Del Ponte has acknowledged that this claim was true.

When he appeared in court, Karadzic stated that he was granted immunity from war crimes charges in a deal reached with former US Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, architect of the Dayton Accord. “In line with our deal, [former Secretary of State under President Bill Clinton] Madeleine Albright proposed to the President of the Republika Srpska, Bilyana Plavsic, that I should leave for Russia, Greece or Serbia to open a private medical clinic there”, he said.

Del Ponte's spokeswoman, Florence Hartmann, has said, “Information about the fugitives' whereabouts was abundant, however, it would always turn out that one of the three countries—the US, Britain or France—would block arrests”.

“Sometimes arrest operations were halted by [former French President Jacques] Chirac personally, other times by Clinton”, she added.

Hartmann commented in an interview that “the reasons why Western powers don't want to see Karadzic and Mladic on trial is...their very likely intent to put the blame for the crimes they have committed on the international community by saying that they have been given a green or orange light to take over the Srebrenica enclave”.

“Western powers created the conditions for mass killings to happen”, she added. From the day the ICTY was created “there was an effort to steer justice to justify the actions of the big powers in their response to the war, the genocide.... They consistently tried to overlook who was indicted, and then selectively provided evidence and even altered it depending if the Tribunal mandate to establish the truth would harm them or not”.

On September 14, 2009, Hartmann was convicted of contempt of court by the ICTY for revealing the existence of two confidential rulings of the ICTY that approved the concealment of evidence relating to a decision to acquit Serbia from direct involvement in the Srebrenica massacre.

Karadzic has still not faced public trial more than three years later. His is detained in the UN facility at Scheveningen, described as the world's most luxurious prison, where inmates have single cells with shower, toilet, wash basin, desk and satellite TV and access to games rooms, a library and a private room for conjugal visits.

Even without direct proof of the involvement of the US and European powers in shielding Mladic and Karadzic, their political responsibility for all the crimes committed during the Bosnian war is beyond question.

Germany and the US played the decisive role in engineering the break-up of Bosnia and the whole of Yugoslavia, through their cultivation of nationalist and communalist politicians such as Croatian President Franjo Tudjman and Bosnian Muslim leader Alija Izetbegovic. These figures were as culpable as Mladic and Karadzic of plunging Bosnia into civil war.

Yugoslavia's break-up in the late 1980s and early 1990s was brought about as a result of policies dictated by the Western powers and imposed through the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. The aim of the Western powers was to dismantle the state-run economy and restore their direct domination over Yugoslavia. Soaring inflation and huge job losses provoked strikes and mass protests, to which the rival ex-Stalinist bureaucrats responded by whipping up nationalist divisions and competing for backing from the Western powers.

Three ethnically based parties came to dominate Bosnia by as early as 1990—the Serbian Democratic Party, the Muslim Party of Democratic Action (SDA) and the Croatian Democratic Community (HDZ). Ethnic tensions exploded following the collapse of the USSR and the reunification of Germany in 1991. German imperialism promoted first the secession of Slovenia and then Croatia, as a means of countering Soviet influence and promoting its own in a region long-seen as a bulwark against any possible Soviet thrust into the Mediterranean.

The US abandoned its earlier opposition to the break-up of Yugoslavia in order to challenge Germany's efforts to secure its own hegemony. Washington became the main sponsor of Bosnian, and then Kosovan, independence against the dominant Serbian government's efforts to maintain a unitary state. The result was civil war in the most ethnically divided state in the region, Bosnia.

Washington only opposed ethnic cleansing when carried out by Serbia, supporting similar crimes by Croatia. Most infamously the White House backed Operation Storm in 1995, which drove 200,000 Serbs from the Krajina. Thousands of sorties were carried out by the US Air Force to aid the Croatian and Bosnian Muslim forces in carrying out the largest acts of ethnic cleansing of the civil war.

The origins of the Srebrenica massacre lay in its designation as a "safe area" by the United Nations, which allowed it to become a base for the Bosnian Muslim Army (ABiH) to attack Serb forces. Mladic's forces entered the town on July 11, slaughtering those trying to escape to Tuzla and making no distinction between soldiers and civilians.

The "reward" now being offered in return for Mladic's arrest—candidate membership in the EU—will itself be a bitter pill for the Serbian working class. Representatives of the EU and the International Monetary Fund have made clear that there

will only be financial aid for the former Yugoslav Republic if it steps up attacks on the living standards of the population.

Serbian Minister for Economic and Regional Development Verica Kalanovic and the head of the IMF mission Albert Jaeger announced that the Serbian government will continue to pursue tough austerity measures, targeting the country's education and pensions systems, and stepping up privatisation of public enterprises. EU Commission President Manuel Barroso said on May 19 in Belgrade that the government must make further efforts to strengthen fiscal policy and improve the investment climate.

Serbia was forced to agree a €3 billion loan with the IMF in 2009 to refinance its debt to foreign banks. The government has reduced public spending drastically and frozen salaries to reduce the budget deficit from 4.8 percent to 4 percent. The size of the public sector was reduced by 10 percent in 2010, but public enterprises still employ 26 percent of the workforce. Further privatisations will be socially devastating.

The minimum wage is equivalent to just \$194 per month. Average net monthly income is about \$422. Unemployment benefits are currently pegged at 50 to 60 percent of average final salary, and are paid according to age and length of employment for a period of just one month to a maximum 24 months. A single person dependent on welfare receives a meagre €60 and a family of four only €110.

Strikes are becoming more frequent. At the end of March, over 10,000 public sector employees protested against low wages and poor working conditions. Doctors, police officers and other employees joined the protest by teachers, who have been fighting for a pay rise since January. Students in their final year also supported the teachers' protests.



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